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ABSTRACT

The conceptual framework is vital in linking elements of quality assurance in teacher education. The development of professional accountability in teacher education is a continuum that links colleges of education responsible for teacher education to the state, to teachers' induction processes within the schools, to professional and learned societies that shape knowledge in the respective fields (national societies), and to accomplished professionals as judged by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Quality assurance in teacher education enables schools and colleges of education to be guided by professional standards. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education Standards serves this purpose. A conceptual framework within a unit establishes the unit's purpose in preparing teacher education and school personnel candidates. It enables a unit to articulate and share with its professional community its way of thinking and being, its reasons for existence, its underlying beliefs and values, and its learning objectives and outcomes. The unit's conceptual framework is the initial catalyst in its contribution to the state and the profession. Once a unit has decided its purpose, it must determine what to teach in order to achieve that purpose and ensure that candidates know the subjects they will teach. A conceptual framework can enhance institutional/unit effectiveness and enrich uniqueness, providing a sense of direction for development and refinement of programs, courses, teaching, research, and service by faculty. (SM)

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UTILIZING THE CONCEPT OF "CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK" IN NATIONAL ACCREDITATION

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February 8, 1999

The opportunity to see "the big picture" vis-à-vis the idea of professional accountability (that is, a system of quality assurance) in teacher education may be garnered from the professional standards promulgated by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. The primary element of these standards is embedded in the assumption that professional education programs are derived from a conceptual framework. This concept of "conceptual framework," has proven to be quite elusive for many units. The purpose here is therefore to show how the concept of "conceptual framework," is the most vital mechanism in linking elements of quality assurance in teacher education.

Quality Assurance

As articulated in the Report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996):

> Clearly, if students are to achieve high standards, we can expect no less from their teachers and other educators. The first priority is reaching agreement on what teachers should know and be able to do in order to help students succeed. Unaddressed for decades, this task has recently been completed by three professional bodies, The National Council for

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> Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (The National Board). Their combined efforts to set standards for teacher education, beginning teacher licensing, and advanced certification outline a continuum of teacher development throughout the career. These standards offer the most powerful tools we have for reaching and rejuvenating the soul of the profession (Summary Report, **What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future**, September 1996, p. 18).

The development of professional accountability in teacher education may therefore be seen as a continuum that links a College of Education (a Unit) responsible for the initial preparation of candidates, to the public authority for its operation, a State, to the induction process for candidates into the field (school sites), to the professional and learned societies that shape what is taken for knowledge in the respective fields (national societies), to the accomplished professional as judged by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The following figure captures the essence of the foregoing:

PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL

	STATE/PUBLIC (Money, management, control, state standards) [INTASC]	
INITIAL PREPARATION (Unit, College of Education, as locus of accountability) **PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES** ■ NCATE ■ National Subject Matter Societies	**INDUCTION PROCESS** (At professional development field sites)	**ACCOMPLISHED PROFESSIONAL** (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification) [NBPTS]

Utilizing the idea of Conceptual Framework

Quality assurance in teacher education when viewed through a three-legged stool metaphor (NCATE, INTASC, NBPTS), enables Schools/Colleges of Education to be guided by professional standards, especially if standards are defined in a normative sense as measures of what ought to be. The standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education serve this purpose. Consequently, a school/college seeking national accreditation is required to lay out its conceptual framework. The new NCATE 2000 Performance Standards is expected to reaffirm the vital importance of a conceptual framework by requiring units to lay out the conceptual framework context for candidate, faculty and unit performance assessment.

Seeing the Big Picture/Working Definitions

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1977) offers definitions of the following terms:

> **Concept** (n) - an abstract or generic idea generalized from particular instances.
> **Conception** (n) - the sum of a person's ideas and beliefs concerning something.
> **Conceptual** (adj) - of, relating to, or consisting of concepts.
> **Framework** (n) - a skeletal, openwork, or structural frame; basic structure (as of ideas). The larger branches of a tree that determine its shape. A frame of reference.

Every Unit, i.e., School/Department/College of Education, as a conceptual system, has a structure. Structure refers to a framework of related conceptual meanings and their generalizations that explain physical, natural, social and human realities. A conceptual framework, therefore, facilitates the fashioning of a coherent perspective into a Unit by relating its parts into a coherent pattern or whole.

Elements of a Conceptual Framework

It is clear from the foregoing definitions that a conceptual framework is more than a **theme** (a subject or topic of discourse or of artistic representation) or a **model** (a set of plans for a building; a miniature representation of something). Instead, a unit's conceptual framework

establishes the purpose (the why) of a unit's efforts in preparing teacher education and school personnel candidates. The literature shows that a key variable in effective programs is "coherence," that is, the extent to which curriculum, instruction, the integration of technology, and assessment and evaluation are aligned to form a coherent whole (Koppich & Knapp, 1998; Knapp, 1997). Effective units and programs provide a conceptual framework (the common vision) that helps candidates to see the usefulness of their entire program, including the integration of field and clinical components and other elements of the professional preparation program.

A conceptual framework enables a unit to articulate and share with its professional community its way of seeing, thinking and being. This way of seeing, thinking and being encapsulates the sense of the unit across all unit programs. In addition, it sets forth the operational manner of the unit regarding what candidates should know (content knowledge) and be able to do (curricular, technological and pedagogical knowledge and skills), and the kinds of assessments and evaluation measures needed to produce the desired results in candidates' performance. A unit's conceptual framework should,

therefore, provide a sense of direction for the development and refinement of programs, courses, faculty teaching, research and service, candidates and faculty diversity, and unit accountability.

A conceptual framework enables a School/Department/College of Education to articulate the reasons for its existence: its underlying philosophy, its mission consistent with its institutional mission, its aim, learning outcomes for candidates in its programs that define what they should know and be able to do, and to what they should be disposed, the knowledge base(s) from sound research and best practice on teaching and learning upon which the learning outcomes are grounded, and the means by which the desired results in candidate performance will continuously be assessed and evaluated.

Underlying Components

If units view a conceptual framework as a way of seeing the world, that is, as a unit's frame of reference, then one recognizes the necessity of the unit having to articulate it's underlying beliefs and values, it's **philosophy**. Since philosophy enables one to explore questions of existence, then the unit's conceptual framework should include the reason for its existence, its **aim**. Aims give rise to a unit examining why it is preparing its graduates.

As a result, **learning outcomes** should be articulated, through **learning objectives** that enable the unit to know what graduates should know (**understandings/knowledge**), be able to do (**skills**), and to what they should be disposed (**dispositions**).

These learning outcomes should be grounded in a **knowledge base**. In other words, why the respective learning outcomes are important for a unit should be justified through the knowledge base for teacher education.

The NCATE 2000 Performance Standards are expected to ask units to first lay out the conceptual context for their response to standards on candidates' performance and assessment and evaluation of that performance.

The conceptual framework as a way of seeing, thinking and being thus enables units to move from questions of purpose (why) to questions of content (what) to questions of method (how). In other words, in utilizing a conceptual framework, a unit states what is delivered in order to achieve its purpose. Consequently, a unit's assessment and evaluation system would entail its ascertaining whether its graduates were acquiring the learning outcomes, and as a result, would provide an understanding of whether the unit was achieving its overall aim, its purpose.

Professional Accountability Link

Since the unit is a part of a quality assurance continuum, its way of seeing and thinking is intended to contribute to the authority which governs its existence, the State, and to the profession, manifested in national subject area societies. As a result, the unit's conceptual framework, its way of seeing the world, acts as the initial catalyst in the unit's contribution to the state and the profession.

Having decided the learning outcomes vital to achieving its aim (its purpose), the unit then contributes to the state by showing how its learning outcomes are compatible with and reinforce the learning outcomes as articulated by the organization for state standards, INTASC. INTASC, a program of the Council of Chief State School Officers, has crafted standards for licensing new teachers. As a result, these performance assessment learning outcomes as outlined by INTASC serve as means by which a unit is able to show how its outcomes are contributing to the achievement of state standards. Some states, for example, Florida, may have additional learning outcomes such as the Educator Accomplished Practices and the Sunshine State Standards. Again the unit's conceptual framework should enable it to

demonstrate to the State that its outcomes are helping it, the unit, to achieve its articulated aim, and as a result, the unit outcomes are also compatible with and enhances the achievement of state standards.

The national professional societies also promulgate learning outcomes, i.e., what candidates should know and be able to do, through program standards. The unit's conceptual framework again should facilitate the unit moving from its learning outcomes first to showing that these outcomes are reinforcing those promulgated by the national subject area societies and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Conceptual Link to Professional Standards

Unit Outcomes	INTASC Principles	State Standards	Program Standards/NBPTS
Learning Objectives ✒ understandings ✒ skills ✒ dispositions	**Learning Objectives** ✒ understandings ✒ skills ✒ dispositions	**Learning Objectives** ✒ understandings ✒ skills ✒ dispositions	**Learning Objectives** ✒ understandings ✒ skills ✒ dispositions

The starting point for some units is the INTASC Principles instead of its own outcomes.

Application to Performance Assessment

Once units have decided their purpose(s) they must next decide what should be taught in their programs in order to achieve that/those purpose(s). Units must ensure that candidates know the subjects they will teach, and can

demonstrate the knowledge and competence expected of a beginning or experienced teacher. The focus of the new NCATE 2000 Performance Standards, as well as the INTASC and NBPTS Principles, is on candidates' knowledge and competence (structural knowledge) including the application of that knowledge and competence in clinical practice (procedural knowledge and the candidates' impact on PK-12 student learning), and on the assessment and evaluation of candidates' performance.

A conceptual framework should enable a unit to move from "the why" of its efforts and its programs to candidates' performance (content knowledge - "the what") and its impact on student learning (curricular and pedagogical knowldege - "the how"). Program Performance Standards being developed by specialty organizations will, in the NCATE 2000 Standards, emphasize what candidates should know and be able to do.

The "when" of the unit's efforts may be seen in its conceptual framework as determining (assessing and measuring) the candidates' performance and its impact on PK-12 student learning. Performance-based assessment in this context should facilitate multiple authentic assessment measures and core assessments of the areas of knowing that (content),

knowing how (curricular and pedagogical), and the impact of knowing that and knowing how on student learning. Parkay and Stanford (1998, p. 336) provide some working definitions of key terms here:

> **Assessment** - the process of obtaining information that is used to make educational decisions about students, to give feedback to the student about his/her progress, strengths, and weaknesses, to judge instructional effectiveness and curricular adequacy, and to inform policy.
> **Authentic Assessments** - require students to use higher-level thinking skills to perform, create or solve real-life problems.
> **Performance Assessments** - used to determine what students can do as well as what they know. These assessments may take the form of the teacher observing and evaluating actual performance or application of skill and/or teacher evaluating products created by students.
> **Portfolio Assessment** - purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the students' efforts, progress, and achievements.
> **Measurement** - gathering quantitative (and/or qualitative) data related to the knowledge and skill students have acquired. Measurement yields scores, rankings or ratings that teachers use to compare students.
> **Evaluation** - making judgments about or assigning a value to those measurements related to the knowledge and skill students have acquired.

Conceptual Framework and Output Standards

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Candidates' Knowledge And Competence		Assessments of Candidate Performance
✓ structural knowledge ✓ content/professional ✓ procedural knowledge content pedagogical/pedagogical	Clinical Practice	✓ authentic assessments multiple measures ✓ core assessments * knowing that * knowing how * impact on student learning

Program/State Standards/ PDS Standards
NBPTS Standards

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The use of a conceptual framework also facilitates a unit's way of seeing and thinking about input process elements. For example, a unit's way of thinking about its purpose (why) and content (matter) and way of delivering the content (manner) should engender ways of seeing and thinking about the culture of the unit in terms of candidate and faculty composition (diversity); faculty performance and development (scholarship of the classroom); the institutional and unit will (to govern), and capacity (to provide necessary resources and facilities).

Conceptual Framework as Enhancing Institutional/Unit Effectiveness

A conceptual framework that enhances seeing and thinking in terms of the whole (the unit), to its parts (departments, programs, projects, committees, and so on), and back to the whole, the college or unit also facilitates the unit's way of making meaning of its decision making in how it delivers its curriculum, how it attends to its candidates, how it enhances faculty vitality, and how unit accountability is provided. In this framework, goals planning for the unit is given meaning vis-à-vis what is delivered in order to achieve its aim. This goals focused model leads to a relationship

between the unit (the college), its department and programs, and the products and goals each develops in order to enhance a unified, and coherent operation.

The aim of the unit may thus be facilitated by a process of continuous improvement that moves from seeing the big unit picture, to the work of the college/unit to achieve its big picture goals through its parts (departments, programs, etc.), to the use of the results of the foregoing efforts to effect change.

Continuous Improvement Model

UNIVERSITY MISSION	UNIT MISSION	DEPARTMENT MISSION	PROGRAMS
GOALS	GOALS	GOALS	CANDIDATE PERFORMANCE
1.	CURRICULUM	➡	❍ KNOWING THAT
2.	CANDIDATES	➡	❍ KNOWING HOW
3.	FACULTY	➡	❍ IMAPCT ON STUDENT
4.	GOVERNANCE	➡	LEARNING
5.			ASSESSMENT SYSTEM
	PLAN BUDGET MEASURES OF SUCCESS RESULTS USE OF RESULTS		

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Value of Conceptual Framework

The use of a conceptual framework by a unit enriches its uniqueness. It also reinforces that while there may be many teacher education units, the ends agreed upon by the profession is the goal. The means to those ends

may vary, and it is the use of a conceptual framework that provide units freedom to achieve and contribute to professional agreed upon ends in their own unique manner.

The use of a conceptual framework also enables clear distinctions being made between a conceptual framework as a way of seeing, thinking, and being, and a theme, and a model. A unit theme simply becomes a slogan that captures the unit's day-to-day activities. A unit model enriches a theme by being a simplified representation of different unit operations. However, the unit's conceptual framework encompasses both theme and model by establishing a sense of unity across all the programs in the unit. It provides a sense of direction for development and refinement of programs, courses, teaching, research and service by faculty. It sets forth the operational manner of the unit, and it establishes goals that will lead to a unified whole while still permitting individual interests and pursuits.

End Notes

Here are some important working definitions:

> **Mission** - a specific task with which a group is charged; (to impose a task or responsibility on).

Aim - to direct a course; the directing of effort toward a goal; a clearly directed intent or purpose.
Goal - the end toward which effort is directed.
Outcome - something that follows as a result or consequent.
Objective - something toward which effort is directed.
(Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1977)

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